

# AROUND TOWN

FRIDAY, AUGUST 8, 2008

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# A FEAST OF THEATER

The Taipei Arts Festival marks its 10th year by inviting six theater companies to present plays that examine creation, revenge and religion

BY NOAH BUCHAN  
STAFF REPORTER

## FESTIVAL NOTES

ON THE NET: [www.taipeifestival.org](http://www.taipeifestival.org)

**WHAT:** *I La Galigo*  
(加利哥的故事)

**WHERE:** Metropolitan Hall (城市舞台),  
25, Bade Rd Sec 3, Taipei City  
(台北市八德路三段25號)

**WHEN:** Tonight and tomorrow at 7:30pm;  
Sunday at 2:30pm

**TICKETS:** NT\$500 to NT\$2,400,  
available through NTCH ticketing



PHOTO COURTESY OF TAF

**WHAT:** *La Boite*

(台法視覺音樂偶劇場—戲箱)

**WHERE:** Taipei Zhongshan Hall  
(台北市中山堂), 98 Yenping S Rd, Taipei City  
(台北市延平南路98號)

**WHEN:** Aug. 15 and Aug. 16 at 7:30pm;  
Aug. 17 at 2:30pm

**TICKETS:** NT\$400 to NT\$1,200,  
available through NTCH ticketing



PHOTO COURTESY OF TAF

**WHAT:** *Sin Sangre*  
(黑暗裡有光)

**WHERE:** Taipei Zhongshan Hall  
(台北市中山堂), 98 Yenping S Rd, Taipei City  
(台北市延平南路98號)

**WHEN:** Aug. 22 and Aug. 23 at 7:30pm;  
Aug. 24 at 2:30pm

**TICKETS:** NT\$500 to NT\$2,000, available  
through NTCH ticketing



PHOTO COURTESY OF TAF

**WHAT:** *Total Woman*  
(這一夜·Women 說相聲)

**WHERE:** Metropolitan Hall (城市舞台),  
25, Bade Rd Sec 3, Taipei City  
(台北市八德路三段25號)

**WHEN:** Aug. 22 and Aug. 23 at 7:30pm;  
Aug. 24 at 2:30pm

**TICKETS:** NT\$500 to NT\$1,900,  
available through NTCH ticketing



PHOTO COURTESY OF TAF

**WHAT:** *Hua-yen Sutra — Mind as a  
Skillful Painter* (華嚴經之心如工畫師)

**WHERE:** Metropolitan Hall (城市舞台),  
25, Bade Rd Sec 3, Taipei City  
(台北市八德路三段25號)

**WHEN:** Aug. 29 and Aug. 30 at 7:30pm;  
Aug. 31 at 2:30pm

**TICKETS:** NT\$500 to NT\$2,000,  
available through NTCH ticketing

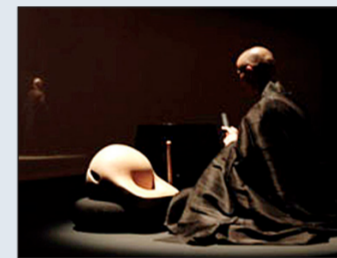


PHOTO COURTESY OF TAF

**WHAT:** *The Life and Times of Louis I. Kahn*  
(這一夜·路易·康說建築)

**WHERE:** Taipei Zhongshan Hall  
(台北市中山堂), 98 Yenping S Rd, Taipei City  
(台北市延平南路98號)

**WHEN:** Sept. 5 and Sept. 6 at 7:30pm;  
Sept. 6 at 2:30pm

**TICKETS:** NT\$800, available through  
NTCH ticketing



PHOTO COURTESY OF TAF

The Golden Twins were destined for tragedy if they remained together, or so an oracle predicted. To avoid a nasty end, they were separated at birth in the hope that the prophecy wouldn't be fulfilled.

This story of forbidden love forms part of *I La Galigo*, a play adapted by acclaimed director Robert Wilson from an Indonesian creation myth. It is the first of six performances in the 10th Taipei Arts Festival (TAF), which also includes free lectures and workshops by some of the world's top theater professionals.

Wilson's *I La Galigo* adapts the story of the creation of the Earth as recorded in the *Sureq Galigo*, an epic poem written by the Bugis people of South Sulawesi that consists of 6,000 folio pages and dates back to Indonesia's pre-Islamic history.

The play's cosmological setting is the Upper World and Under World of the gods and the Middle World they create to house humans and the descendants of the gods. At the heart of the tale is the incestuous love of the hero Sawerigading for his twin sister, We Tenriabeng, and his attempt to avoid the passions that could destroy their kingdom.

The three-hour performance casts more than 50 actors and fuses the dance, storytelling and myths of the Bugis people and chronicles one cycle in the birth, aging and death of creation. Respected Indonesian composer Rahayu Supanggah compliments the dancing and acting with a hypnotic musical score.

Instead of gods creating humans, humans create puppets in *La Boite*, the result of a two-year collaboration between Taiwan's Taiyuan Puppet Theater Company (台原偶戲團) and France's Compagnie des Zonzons, which begins its run next week.

Using a blend of human actors, puppets and spherical installations, the two companies fuse their aesthetic ideals to create a love story between the puppets and humans that will be accompanied by live musicians using instruments from both Asia and the West.

Rather than using puppets to create a visual language on the stage, Chilean-based theater group Teatro Cinema blends the vocabulary of film with a traditional approach to the stage to mount a story of revenge called *Sin Sangre* (Without Blood), which begins its run on Aug. 22 at 7:30pm.

Based on the novel *Senza Sangue* by Italian novelist Alessandro Baricco, the play begins with the revenge killing of a man and his family. His youngest daughter survives after one of the murderers lets her go free, and decades later she exacts her own revenge on the killers. The denouement is a physical and psychological showdown between the woman and the man who set her free decades before.

On the same weekend, Performance Workshop Theater reprises its 2005 play *Total Woman* (這一夜·Women 說相聲). The work, written and directed by acclaimed Taiwanese theater maestro Stan Lai (賴聲川), employs the Chinese comedic genre called cross talk (相聲) — a form of witty dialogue usually played by male

actors that employs complex wordplay to critique social conventions.

With *Total Woman*, Lai updates the tradition by using an all-female cast who discuss weighty issues such as women's rights, work-related anxiety and love, as well as lighter fare such as why women wear makeup. The audience can expect to laugh while the women on stage shed tears.

It is doubtful that anyone will leave the theater crying after watching Mathias Woo's esoteric *Hua-yen Sutra — Mind as a Skillful Painter* (華嚴經之心如工畫師). They might, however, feel spiritually uplifted. Woo, a director for Hong Kong-based theater company Zuni Icosahedron, hopes to return art to a time when it possessed sacred significance.

The performance is a mixture of chanting, music, dance and digital images that is meant to replicate the Buddha's insight that the world is forged entirely by the mind.

*The Life and Times of Louis I. Kahn* is a kind of companion piece to *Hua-yen Sutra* in that Woo continues his investigation of the mind — though here through the work and life of Louis I. Kahn, one of the 20th century's most influential architects. Using the theories of minimalism propounded by Kahn, Woo investigates the relationship of light, space and materials through theater.

Hong Kong television celebrity Kam Kwok Leung (甘國亮), mentor to film director Wong Kar-wai (王家衛), will play the role of Louis I. Kahn.

## Legends for modern times

BY IAN BARTHOLOMEW  
STAFF REPORTER

'Kun' opera may not be to every culture's liking, but Lanting Kun Opera Troupe's latest production breathes new life into the ancient art form

Though Lanting Kun Opera Troupe (蘭庭昆劇團) is a relative newcomer to Taiwan's traditional art scene, it has already done much to promote *kun* opera (昆劇) to a younger generation and has won recognition for its innovative work.

The troupe's director, Wang Chih-ping (王志萍), earlier this year won a Golden Melody Award for producing *Quest for the Garden Saunter and the Interrupted Dream* (尋找遊園驚夢), which is no small achievement for a group that was only re-established in 2005.

In the case of *Quest*, Wang said the production succeeded because the troupe experimented with non-conventional performance spaces — the original production was designed for the cavernous spaces of Huashan Culture Park's Rice Wine Factory building (台北華山文化園區米酒作業場) — and this gave the show a cutting-edge appeal that traditional opera lacks.

*Six Legends of Lan Ting* (蘭庭六記), Lanting Kun Opera Troupe's production for this year, is wholly dissimilar to *Quest*: the former is a simple presentation of scenes excerpted from six well-known operas while the

latter is a multi-day opera of 55 scenes rolled into one story performed in a single sitting.

Each segment of *Six Legends* highlights an aspect of the *sheng* (生) male character. "There are many divisions and subdivisions within the *sheng* character type," said Wang. "We wanted to show off the huge variety of performance styles encompassed within this character type."

*Quest* focuses on Du Liniang (杜麗娘), one of the defining female roles of Chinese theater.

In addition to Lanting's own talented performers, *Six Legends* stars Wen Yuhang (溫宇航), who is best-known in the West for his performance in the 19-hour 1999 Lincoln Center production of *The Peony Pavilion* (牡丹亭). It is per-

formances like these that give substance to talk of a *kun* opera revival, especially as an international performance medium similar to Italian opera.

Wen, who is currently based in the US, said in an interview before rehearsals last week that he has "seen audiences change from people with white hair to people with black hair. [*Kun* opera] is very classical, and the classical is now fashionable. Not to have seen a production, or at least know about *The Peony Pavilion*, is for a modern person the same as missing something [in their repertoire of cultural references]."

*Six Legends* brings together excerpts from five Ming Dynasty operas and one rarely performed Yuan Dynasty opera, including an excerpt from *The Peony*

*Pavilion*, which will be part of tomorrow's program. While the production attempts to make these segments stand alone, audiences will benefit from knowing the often complex backstories; nevertheless, the focus is less on the narrative than on Wen's star turn.

While English subtitles won't be available, Wang said that the troupe has prepared a comprehensive publication about *Six Legends'* re-interpretation opera (to be sold separately from the program), which will contain abstracts of the operas in English.

"We have put considerable effort in extending the reach of *kun* opera through publication and merchandising," Wang said. In addition to these detailed show notes, Lanting will also be releasing notebooks with cute sketches of the characters, book marks and other merchandise. "We want to have things people can take away with them," she said. "Something to make these stories part of people's lives."

Lanting Kun Opera Troupe invigorated *kun* opera by throwing out the rule book.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF LANTING KUN OPERA TROUPE

